

Chapter Three

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. Do you think the people repaired the part of the wall they chose, or that they were assigned the part they were to work on? Would they have cast lots, so that they could not blame anyone else if their part was more difficult than others?
2. How do you suppose the work was financed?
3. Where did the materials come from?
4. Do you suppose they all had the same motive for what they were doing, or the same enthusiasm?

OUTLINE

There is only one topic in this chapter: Description of the rebuilding of the wall, section by section.

We will depart from our usual method in this chapter, and arrange the material topically for our discussion, hoping that it will be of greater interest and usefulness if treated in this manner. Each section will include parallels, or applications, for today. Three headings will be used:

1. Who the builders were,
2. What part they built, and
3. How they built.

TEXT AND VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENT

TEXT, 3:1-32

- 1 Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel.
- 2 And next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

- 3 Now the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.
- 4 And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs.
- 5 Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters.
- 6 And Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors, with its bolts and its bars.
- 7 Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, also made repairs for the official seat of the governor of the province beyond the River.
- 8 Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. And next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.
- 9 And next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs.
- 10 Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs.
- 11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahathmoab repaired another section and the Tower of Furnaces.
- 12 And next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters.
- 13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and a thousand cubits of the wall to the Refuse Gate.
- 14 And Malchijah the son of Rechab, the official of the district of Beth-haccherem repaired the Refuse Gate. He built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars.
- 15 Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the official of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He built it, covered it,

- and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and the wall of the Pool of Shelah at the King's Garden as far as the steps that descend from the city of David.
- 16 After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, official of half the district of Beth-zur, made repairs as far as a point opposite the tombs of David, and as far as the Artificial Pool and the House of the Mighty Men.
- 17 After him the Levites carried out repairs under Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, the official of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district.
- 18 After him their brothers carried out repairs under Bavvai the son of Henadad, official of the other half of the district of Keilah.
- 19 And next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the official of Mizpah, repaired another section, in front of the ascent of the armory at the Angle.
- 20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the Angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest.
- 21 After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house.
- 22 And after him the priests, the men of the valley, carried out repairs.
- 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah carried out repairs beside his house.
- 24 After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah as far as the Angle and as far as the corner.
- 25 Palal the son of Uzai made repairs in front of the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs.
- 26 And the temple servants living in Ophel made repairs as far as the front of the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower.

- 27 After him the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great projecting tower and as far as the wall of Ophel.
- 28 Above the Horse Gate the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house.
- 29 After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house. And after him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, carried out repairs.
- 30 After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters.
- 31 After him Malchijah one of the goldsmiths, carried out repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, in front of the Inspection Gate and as far as the upper room of the corner.
- 32 And between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants carried out repairs.

COMMENT:

The construction of the entire wall is described here, as though it was all completed immediately. More details of the work, and the hazards they overcame, occupy the next three chapters; at Neh. 6:15 we are told of the completion of the work.

In this chapter the arrangement of materials is not necessarily chronological, but geographic, moving from the Sheep Gate on the north side of the city counterclockwise section by section in order till we are brought back again to the Sheep Gate. For this reason this chapter furnishes the most extensive description of the city of Jerusalem that appears anywhere in the Bible.

Much of the material needed would be lying all about them: the stones from the old wall. Nehemiah had gotten permission to bring other material from the king's forest (2:8). Labor would be the largest item: digging, discarding debris, shaping, moving, lifting, fitting. What money was needed may have been contributed by each group.

1. The builders were from many backgrounds.

(1) There were men whose profession was religion. The chapter begins (3:1) with a mention of the high priest Eliashib and his brothers the priests. Nehemiah, a government official, does them the honor of placing them first. It is probable also that they were the first to begin the project. Meremoth, in *verse 4*, was identified with the priesthood by Ezra (8:33); other priests appear in *verses 22, 28*, possibly indicating residence in other quarters of the city.

We may ask if it is necessary to understand that they actually handled rocks and timbers. Perhaps they only supervised, or financed certain parts of the construction. But this is not stated; they had as much at stake in the city's future as any others, and it need not be a surprise if they were toiling side by side with their fellow-citizens. This is especially suggested by the phrase, "arose and built."

Levites are also mentioned (*vs. 17*), and temple servants (*26*) who lived in Ophel, the part of the city where the Temple was located.

(2) There were government officials located not only at Jerusalem (*vss. 9, 12*), but in nearby cities as well (*vss. 14-19*). Besides their families, they would have at their disposal many persons under their pay or authority. One who is also mentioned, who was of a lower rank than these, was the keeper of the East Gate (*vs. 29*). The entire function of government could be improved by good walls, so these men helped.

(3) Then there were businessmen. The goldsmiths (*vss. 8, 13, 32*) would compare with our jewelers. The perfumers (*vs. 8*) would be similar to our druggists. The merchants (*vs. 32*) would be our grocers, taylor, hardware dealers, storekeepers in general. Walls of security would be vital to them, and they were willing to expend the necessary energy and effort to provide them.

(4) There were people who came from other districts and cities: Jericho (*vs. 2*), Tekoa (*vss. 5, 27*), Gibeon and Mizpah (*vs. 7*), and many others (*vss. 13-19*). Their survival would be more likely with a strongly fortified city close by.

(5) Even women were included (*vs. 12*). It is nothing new for

ladies to work in field or factory, office or classroom, militia or commerce, when they are needed.

2. They built in many different environs.

Because some of the locations are especially appropriate to the people who made the repairs (close to their own homes, Levites at Ophel, priests at the gate where sheep were brought in, close to the Temple), we would guess that they had some choice of where they would work. It is also true that persons work the best at things they are interested in; while the wall would be monotonously the same all around the city, the surroundings would be exceedingly varied and would furnish a point of interest. Perhaps, then, we can try to guess why they repaired at these particular sites; perhaps those who give of their effort to the church today have a similar range of interests.

(1) Most prominently mentioned are the gates. There are ten of them: Sheep (*vss. 1, 32*), Fish (*vs. 3*), Old (*vs. 6*), Valley (*vs. 13*), Refuse (*vs. 14*), Fountain (*vs. 15*), Water (*vs. 26*), Horse (*vs. 28*), Inspection (*vs. 31*), and the keeper of the East Gate appears, though the gate itself is not mentioned in the locations.

Two other gates are mentioned later on in the book: the Gate of Ephraim, and of the Guard (12:39). So the city had twelve gates in Nehemiah's time; this may show how fitting it was for John to speak of the twelve gates of the city in time to come (Rev. 21:12ff).

Gates were often more than entrance ways. They could be large rooms, with walls subdividing them and with benches where elders could sit to hear disputes between neighbors. Note in *vs. 15* that one gate was provided with a cover, or roof. Here the merchants came each evening to make their goods available to the inhabitants (Neh. 13:19-21). So the gate would be important for commerce or for justice. We do see a goldsmith (jeweler) by the Inspection Gate (*vs. 31*), which is also close to the house of the merchants; and other goldsmiths and merchants by the Sheep Gate (*vs. 32*). So today there are those who serve the church

because they see benefits in it for their business, or they see its value in upholding justice, social or otherwise.

(2) Others worked close to the official seat of the governor (of the entire province, when he visited the city on business, *vs. 7*); by the king's garden (*vs. 15*), or by the upper house of the king and the court of the guard, i.e., prison (*vs. 25*). The church commends itself today to some because it fosters general subservience to the government, and makes the government's job easier.

(3) But the king's garden (*vs. 15*) would also be a place of great beauty, and an excellent environment for the one interested in esthetics. So music and art and even a vase of flowers have their place in the church's service.

(4) Half a dozen of the builders looked after the wall close to their own houses (*vss. 10, 23, 28, 29, 30*). The home is an important institution today, and many are appreciative of the role of the church in laying down patterns for enduring homes.

(5) Business interests, or industry, were represented; some labored by the Tower of Furnaces (*vs. 11*). The word is descriptive of baking ovens rather than smelting furnaces; it appears also in *Hos. 7:4ff*. Some industrialists have expressed a preference for hiring church members. Thus the church today attracts support from this kind of people who built Jerusalem's walls.

(6) The tombs of David, the cemetery section, came in for attention. It was this particularly that Nehemiah had used to catch the interest of the king of Persia (2:3). All of the traditions of the past, respect for one's elders, respect for the bravery of the forefathers (the House of the Mighty Men, *vs. 16*, was close by), all of these are involved here; and the church reaches many because of its identification with the traditions of the past.

(7) The ascent of the armory (*vs. 19*), the military training and supply center, drew notice also. While some see our military forces as our first line of defense, they may also see the church and our trust in God as our last line of defense.

(8) Religion was also at stake. Some repaired to the high priest's doorway (*vs. 20*), and to the residence of the temple servants (*vs. 31*). It is certain that some would have seen the need of strong walls then to protect their religious institutions; there are people today

who need no other reason than the need of religion, for their support of the church.

Even this does not exhaust the list. There is still the Artificial Pool (*vs. 16*) and the steps that descend from the City of David (*vs. 15*), the southern section of Jerusalem.

What shall we do about the persons who are drawn to the church by such a variety of motives? Criticize them for their inadequate motives? Or welcome them for the variety of contributions they make to the church all of which are necessary that the total wall, so to speak, can be built? And meanwhile, we seek to educate and improve and clarify their motives.

3. There were differences in how they built.

(1) When the priests launched the project by building a section of the wall, they held a service of consecration. They also included a stretch adjacent to where they had built. This would be characteristic of them; apparently no other part of the wall received that kind of treatment at that time. Perhaps it was because they were priests (although such actions don't follow in *vs. 22* and *28*); or perhaps it was to mark the beginning with dedication ceremonies to ask God's favor on the remainder of the project.

(2) One man, and only one, is remembered for building zealously (*vs. 20*).

(3) The Tekoites built in spite of lack of co-operation from their nobles (*vs. 8*; see Word Studies). They were not dissuaded by the apathy of their leaders, but recognized their obligation to their higher officials of state.

(4) Two of them repaired "another section" after finishing a first (*vs. 21*, cf. *4*; *27*, cf. *5*). It seems that some must always carry double the ordinary load, if the Lord's work is done; it is especially noteworthy that the Tekoites, faced with the unconcern of their most capable, still went ahead with a second portion.

(5) Differences in the condition of the walls can be distinguished. In some places they must be totally rebuilt (*vs. 2*); in others they could simply be repaired (*vs. 4*); in others, they needed only to be

restored: the KJV has "fortified." The sense of this word is vague; literally it means "freed, cut loose, or left" (vs. 8).

The one thing apparent, from first to last, is the careful organization, the willingness of each group to do its small part, to contribute to the whole. A city wall with one gap is useless. An undertaking this large was impossible, except by an extra large amount of co-operation. For a hundred years and more the wall had been in ruins; now, because one man was sufficiently interested, the community was organized to pull together and do the work.

The next three chapters take us back a step and trace the achievement through some of its more difficult hours.

WORD STUDIES

SUPPORT (vs. 5): "put necks to." On the neck or shoulders are placed burdens (yoke: Gen. 27:40). When an ox braces itself to pull, it thrusts its neck or shoulders forward against the yoke. The Tekoite nobles were not doing this; they hadn't "knuckled down" to shoulder their part of the burden.

WALL (vs. 8: Chomah): the word emphasizes what is brought together, rather than what is kept out. The verb form means "to join together, join in affinity; surround with a wall; keep or hold together things conjoined."

A kindred word from the same base means "to bring together, congregate, conjoin." Another from the same base means, "become thick, curdle, coagulate (like milk)." Also from the same base are the words meaning "people," "kinsman," "collect," and the preposition "with."

This is an entirely different word from that which appears in the Word Studies for Ezra nine.

SUMMARY

It is difficult or useless to try to summarize a chapter with so many small details. It has been shown that those who worked on

the wall were from very divergent professions and social levels: priests, jewelers, druggists, government officials, women, Levites, temple servants, merchants, and citizens of neighboring towns. They worked in a variety of environments: the gates, government headquarters, their own houses, down by the bakery, over at the cemetery, alongside the armory, close to the priest's house and the dormitories for the temple servants. They showed a variety of temperaments: reverence, zeal, stubbornness in the face of apathy, doggedly helping with a second section after finishing their first assignment; building anew, repairing, or just cleaning up and passing along.

The church can use all these types, for all these situations, and can watch as its members serve with their humanity showing through the chinks in their armor.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What part did priests take in the work?
2. Why do you suppose they consecrated what they built? Why didn't they consecrate all of it?
3. Were there some who did more than others?
4. Were there people from outside the city who helped?